

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Congresswoman Loretta Sanchez (D-CA), Co-Chair of the Congressional Caucus on Vietnam, today introduced House Resolution 216, calling on Vietnam's government to respect the Vietnamese people's right to free speech and open internet access. Vietnamese officials have increasingly restricted the country's cybercommunity, closing websites and imprisoning journalists and bloggers who use the internet to challenge human rights abuses and the Communist government. Congressmen Ed Royce (R-CA) and Zoe Lofgren (D-CA) joined Rep. Sanchez as original co-sponsors of H. Res. 216.

"For years, the government of Vietnam has pledged to expand the basic human rights and civil liberties of the Vietnamese people, including internet freedom," said Rep. Sanchez. "But despite its stated commitments, Vietnam continues to persecute citizens who use the internet to protest their lack of rights or speak out against the country's Communist government. As a beacon of freedom and democracy throughout the world, America has a responsibility to speak out against these abuses. I urge other Members of Congress to join me in urging Vietnam to expand internet freedom and other basic human rights."

Vietnam has a long history of curtailing internet freedom, freedom of speech, and other civil and political liberties. In 2008, Vietnam's government created the Administration Agency for Radio, Television, and Electronics Information, a seemingly innocuous agency whose sole objective is to restrict internet freedom, censor private blogs, and compel internet service providers to release information on users who violate the prohibitions set out by the country's information ministry. In 2009, Vietnam attracted additional scrutiny for forcing imprisoned Vietnamese bloggers to publicly denounce their criticisms of the Communist government as a condition of their release from prison.

The text of H. Res. 216. is available below:

Whereas the Internet is a tool to exercise freedom of expression and association, both of which are basic human rights;

Whereas the Internet is a medium to share information freely, promote social and economic development, and connect Vietnamese citizens domestically and internationally;

Whereas the Government of Vietnam created the Administration Agency for Radio, Television and Electronics Information in October 2008 and issued Circular 07 in December 2008 to restrict Internet freedom, censor private blogs, and compel information technology companies to cooperate with government efforts to monitor personal information of Internet users;

Whereas the Government of Vietnam has imprisoned bloggers and numerous democracy activists who have distributed their peaceful views over the Internet;

Whereas the Government of Vietnam continues to firewall external websites promoting democracy and human rights; and

Whereas these actions violate individuals' right to freedom of speech and expression: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the House of Representatives—

1. supports the right of Vietnamese citizens to access websites of their choosing and to have the freedom to share and publish information over the Internet;
2. calls on the Government of Vietnam to repeal Circular 07, Article 88, and similar statutes that restrict the Internet, so as to be in line with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which the Socialist Republic of Vietnam is a signatory; and
3. calls on the Government of Vietnam to become a responsible member state of the international community by respecting individuals' freedom of speech, freedom of press, and freedom of political association.